



## **EUROPEAN UNION**

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1281 Vienna, 17 September 2020**

#### **EU Statement on the recent developments in Belarus**

The European Union continues to follow closely the post-election situation in Belarus and remains deeply concerned about the ongoing repression of the peaceful protesters, political opposition, human rights defenders, members of strike committees, civil society and the media.

The EU strongly condemns the violent response of the Belarusian authorities to peaceful protests on 13 September during the so-called March of Heroes in Minsk, in particular the arrests of at least 774 people, solely on the basis of their participation in these protests. We note with concern reports that many of them, including women, were mistreated by the police and detained on fabricated charges. Similar peaceful protests organised in previous days, in particular on 30 August, 4, 5 and 12 September were also forcefully dispersed by the police. The EU urges the Belarusian authorities to fulfil their human rights obligations, including the freedoms of opinion, expression, and peaceful assembly.

We are deeply alarmed that during the ongoing wave of brutal repression, no less than 450 cases of torture and other ill treatment, committed by law enforcement, have been reported to the experts of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Victims have described beatings, prolonged stress positions, electric shocks, and rape in police custody.

International and OSCE commitments are clear: torture and other ill treatment can never be justified under any circumstances. We reiterate our strong call on Belarus to immediately put an end to this practice, to fully investigate all cases and to guarantee the right of victims of torture to obtain redress. Equally, the worryingly

high numbers of cases of protest related disappearances must be fully investigated. The EU has called for an urgent debate on Belarus tomorrow at the UN Human Rights Council.

Two weeks ago the EU drew attention of the Permanent Council to the deteriorating safety of journalists and media actors in Belarus. Regrettably, despite our calls, the situation has not improved. We condemn the ongoing violence against, and unlawful detentions of, journalists and other media workers and urge the Belarusian authorities to ensure their immediate release.

The EU deplores the increasingly blatant disregard for the rule of law in Belarus, in particular the targeted persecution of members of the Coordination Council, in violation of Belarus' domestic law and its international obligations including its OSCE commitments.

All Presidium members of the Coordination Council, except Nobel Prize Laureate Sviatlana Alexievich, have been arrested or forced into exile. In solidarity, EU diplomats continue to support her visiting her regularly. Maxim Znak, Maryja Kaliesnikava, Siarhei Dyleusky, Liliya Vlasova have been illegally arrested. Earlier, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Pavel Latushka and Volha Kavalkova had been forced into exile. The reported annulment of the validity of the passport of Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusevich and subsequent denial of his entry into Belarus, is another grave example of the attacks against the religious leaders in Belarus by state institutions.

Civil society and other actors engaged in discussions on the future of Belarus, including members of the Coordination Council, must be protected from intimidation, forced exile, arbitrary arrest and violence. The EU therefore urges the Belarusian authorities to release immediately all unlawfully detained persons, including political prisoners, and to ensure that such unlawful acts are not repeated.

The European Union recalls the need for an inclusive national dialogue with broader society, in particular with the Coordination Council, to achieve a peaceful solution and deliver a positive response to demands of the Belarusian people for new democratic elections. The harassment of, violence against, and forced exile of members of the Coordination Council and other representatives of civil society runs counter to this objective. The impressive commitment of the Belarusian people

to a democratic future and their persistent call for respect of their fundamental rights deserve a different answer.

In this regard, we support the efforts of the Albanian Chairmanship to reduce tensions and prevent further escalation. The OSCE has the necessary tools and mechanisms to act as an impartial broker in such a crisis and is willing to engage by facilitating a national inclusive dialogue in Belarus. We urge the Belarusian authorities to make use of the offer made by the current and incoming OSCE Chairs.

The EU reiterates its determination to impose sanctions on individuals responsible for violence, the repression of peaceful protests and the falsification of election results and is ready to take further restrictive measures as necessary.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, SERBIA\* and ALBANIA\*, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE align themselves with this statement.

\* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.